Unit .29

Session .01

Living Generously

Scripture

Acts 4:32-5:11

32 Now the entire group of those who believed were
of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any
of his possessions was his own, but instead they held
everything in common. **33** With great power the
apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the
Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. **34** For
there was not a needy person among them because all
those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought
the proceeds of what was sold, **35** and laid them at the
apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person
as any had need. **36** Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by
birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is
translated Son of Encouragement), **37** sold a field he
owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles'
feet. **1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife
Sapphira, sold a piece of property. **2** However, he kept
back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge,
and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles'
feet. **3** "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled
your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part
of the proceeds of the land? **4** Wasn't it yours while
you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your
disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your
heart? You have not lied to people but to God." **5** When
he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a
great fear came on all who heard. **6** The young men
got up, wrapped his body, carried him out, and buried
him. **7** About three hours later, his wife came in, not
knowing what had happened. **8** "Tell me," Peter asked
her, "did you sell the land for this price?" "Yes," she
said, "for that price." **9** Then Peter said to her, "Why
did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the
feet of those who have buried your husband are at the
door, and they will carry you out." **10** Instantly she
dropped dead at his feet. When the young men came
in, they found her dead, carried her out, and buried her
beside her husband. **11** Then great fear came on the
whole church and on all who heard these things.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Christians are to avoid living selfishly, instead giving generously and sacrificially.

Option 1

Your students have been hired to help produce an illustrated dictionary. They are to create either drawings or skits to explain what the following three words mean:

- Generosity
- Honesty
- Reverence

Assign a word to each student, or break them into three small groups. Let them prepare and then share what they came up with. Look for anything that will connect with the points for today's lesson. Afterward, tell them that God calls for His people to live with these three virtues, as we'll see in the lesson today.

Option 2

Your students should imagine the scenario: one of their parents or grandparents has run into a Virtue Genie. A Virtue Genie is a special kind of genie who can only grant one kind of wish: for someone to start practicing a particular virtue. Your relative has asked the genie to make you either generous, honest, or reverent (or, if you really want to go for bonus points, all three).

Your students should now put on skits (or drawings/comic strips) of how they would look as they go about their day exercising these virtues. If they're having trouble coming up with ideas, give them specific settings for their skits.

Have them prepare and then show their skits or their drawings. See what they think lives of generosity, honesty, and reverence look like. Use their skits and drawings to introduce the lesson. In our scenario, a relative wished this virtue upon them; the Bible tells us that God desires His people to live out these three virtues, as we'll see in the lesson today.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 4:32-35.

Parents are generally happy to provide for their kids—shelter, food, clothes (often in ways that far exceed basic necessities!), as well as things like transportation, electronics, and vacations.

- **What are the biggest ways your parents (or those who take care of you) show you generosity?**

God has shared abundantly with us, and yet we often live as though we never have enough—at least not enough to share with others. We forget so quickly that God has blessed us materially and spiritually in more ways than we can count and so often we selfishly hoard the blessings He has given.

In the last verses of Acts 2, we read that, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, the church was growing and unified, and they expressed this unity through sharing generously and sacrificially with one another. This was not a one-time event, but rather a practice of the early church. Believers saw generosity as a natural outflow of their salvation. Rightfully so because sacrificial generosity is a fundamental component of the gospel.

John 3:16, perhaps the most familiar verse in Scripture, tells us that the Father gave His Son. This language shows us that the incarnation is a gift. We were spiritual beggars and in desperate need of grace. We couldn't earn our salvation. We couldn't make a deal with God. Yet God made a way. He generously gave His Son that we might have the gift of salvation. It is the Father who, out of His generosity, gave that priceless gift of Jesus and who also gives every other good and perfect gift.(Luke 11:13; Jas. 1:17).

We are all born with a sin nature and, as long as we are in this life, we will struggle with sin. This means that even those who are followers of Christ can be selfish and greedy. But this does not mean we should accept or excuse these sins. We must continually allow God to work in us to overcome these sins, and others, as we live with humility and generosity to show the watching world the nature of our Father and the core of the gospel message.

- **How has God been generous to you? How can you be more generous the blessings God has given to you?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

Deity of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Acts 4

"Following the first outpouring of the Spirit, the early converts spontaneously formed a community (2:41-47). This was not something they were told to do; it was what they wanted to do. The same thing happened after the outpouring of the Spirit in 4:31. All the believers were in harmony and they shared their possessions with each other (4:32). No one insisted that something was 'mine.' Everything belonged to everybody. Underlying this unity and the healings, signs and wonders and boldness of the apostles was the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, which the apostles continued to proclaim (4:33). God's grace was so powerfully at work that no one in the community was in need (4:34a). This was a fulfillment of the promise in Deuteronomy 15:4-5. People were even prepared to sell their possessions in order to have money to share with others. The money was given to the apostles, who distributed it. There is no sign of their retaining any of it to enrich themselves, as some would do today (4:34b-35)."[1]

"The Christian ought to regard all the things that are given him for his use, not as his to hold as his own or to lay up. Moreover, giving careful heed to all things as the Lord's, he should not overlook any of the things that are being thrown aside and disregarded, should this be the case. No Christian should think of himself as his own master, but each should rather so think and act as though given by God to be slave to his fellow brothers and sisters."[2]

In Defense (p. 50, DDG)

The Bible tells us over and over again that we don't have to live in fear (Isa. 41:10; Ps. 23:4; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 John 4:18). However, Scripture also teaches that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10). When people encountered God's glory, they generally responded in sheer terror. For instance, when God descended upon Mount Sinai, all Israel was terrified (Ex. 20:18). Even Moses trembled in fear (Heb. 12:21). When Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' glory and heard the Father's voice at His transfiguration, they fell on their faces, terrified (Matt. 17:6). John, when He saw the glory of Jesus revealed in a vision, he fell down as if dead out of fear.

When we are made aware of God's holiness, we see our depravity in relation and the natural reaction is legitimate fear. However, because of Jesus and despite that we still wrestle with the flesh, we are made holy in God's sight and are forgiven of our sin. With this in view, we no longer fear the judgment of God, yet we are to live toward Him with a reverential fear that leads to our wisdom and obedience.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 4:36-5:2.

Barnabas provides an incredible example of generosity. To meet the needs of others, he sold a piece of property he owned and gave all the money to the church leaders.

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. However, he kept back part of the proceeds" (5:2). Luke places the account of Barnabas' gift to the church next to Ananias and Sapphira's gift for contrast. Barnabas gave from a sacrificial heart while Ananias and Sapphira gave from a selfish heart The couple likely told the apostles they'd given everything, but had kept some for themselves. While their gift may have appeared to be generous to others, they knew, God knew, and soon Peter would know, it was a mirage.

Ananias and Sapphira saw the ways people responded to Barnabas' generosity, and they wanted that same kind of attention. However, their hearts didn't motivate them to do the things Barnabas did. Barnabas gave with no thought of being recognize; Ananias and Sapphira wanted the recognition and without the sacrifice.

Throughout Acts, sacrificial generosity is on display as a hallmark of the early church. The death and resurrection of Jesus, alongside the gift of the Holy Spirit, changed their views of generosity, which stood in stark contrast to the ways of the world. As God's people, we are to live honest and generous lives, open for all to see.

- **How would you describe culture's view of generosity?**
- **Before today, how would you have explained why generosity is important for Christians? How do you see it differently now?**

Read Acts 5:3-11.

In their selfishness, Ananias and Sapphira had refused to honor God as well as their brothers and sisters. Their sin was very serious, and God held them accountable. When Peter found out about Ananias and Sapphira (through the Holy Spirit), God struck them dead. Why would God kill two people for being a little greedy? Because the purity of the church was at stake. God was not going to allow the couple to ruin the foundation of the early church.

To live selfishly and pridefully is to offend God's honor. As believers and in light of His generosity towards us, we are to share of the things God has given us with others in order to reflect His character to the world.

- **How is God calling you to cultivate generosity in your life?**

COMMENTARY

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Acts 5

"The positive picture of the community's sharing is marred by the account of a couple who abused the practice by holding back a portion of a gift while claiming to be giving it totally to the church. The context is important to note: the incident is bracketed by references to the Spirit's power (4:31, 33; 5:12-16). The Spirit was closely linked to the unity of the fellowship manifested in their sharing. Ananias and Sapphira abused the fellowship through their deception and thereby threatened its unity. The couple kept back some of the proceeds. 'Kept back' (Greek nosphizō) means 'to put aside for oneself, to keep back' in a secret and dishonest way. It is an uncommon word, which was used also in the Septuagint in the story of Achan (Josh. 7:1), who received a sentence of death for holding back some of the spoils that were dedicated to God."[3]

"One of the pictures Luke provides here is wonderfully positive and encouraging (4:32-37); the other is terrifying and sobering (5:1-11). Both accounts describe the selling of property and the giving of an offering from the sales. Both stories also use the adjective 'great': in the first story we read of 'great grace' (4:33); in the next we read of 'great fear' (5:5,11). Luke uses the two scenarios to highlight the kindness and severity of God at work in the church. As a whole, the two stories cooperate to illustrate the nature and importance of unity. Verse 32 describes the unity of the church. The first story highlights how unity is experienced, and the next shows how unity is endangered."[4]

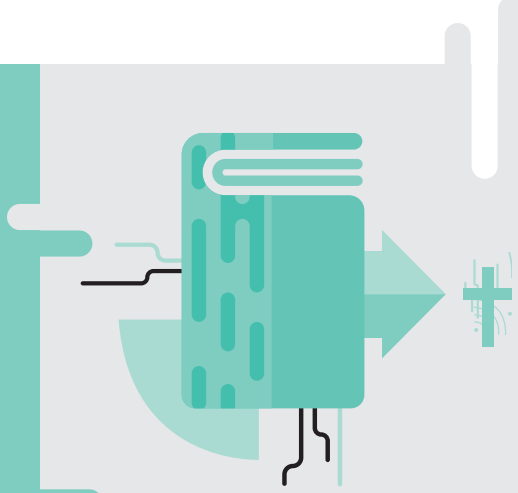
Activity

As a large group, come up with a list of situations or settings where your students frequently find themselves: the dining room, the movie theater, the sports field, the orchestra room, their bedrooms, etc. Break your students into small groups for skits (or, if they prefer, as individuals to draw on paper). Assign each group one of the situations or settings from your list. The theme for their skit is: "Be Like Barnabas, not Ananias and Sapphira." Ananias and Sapphira failed to exercise generosity, honesty, and reverence before the Lord; in contrast, Barnabas did all three.

Let them prepare and then share their skits. Point out the good things you see. As a larger group, debrief what it looks like to be generous, honest, and reverent, even as middle schoolers, in the family, the school, etc. It may be worth nothing that reverent doesn't automatically mean somber all the time; we can be both joyful and reverent, as Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, must have been

(p. 49, DDG) Christ Connection

Ananias and Sapphira's deceptive action was a sin against the Holy Spirit. The Spirit distinguishes between giving that is from a heart of generosity and giving that is from a heart of pride and deceit. The Holy Spirit prompts us to share our resources and give generously to those in need, following the example of Jesus who gave up heavenly riches to share His inheritance with all who trust in Him.



LIVING GENEROUSLY

Christians are to avoid living selfishly, instead giving generously and sacrificially.

JESUS CONNECTION

Ananias and Sapphira's lie was a sin against the Holy Spirit. The Spirit knows when giving comes from a generous heart and when it comes from a proud or deceitful heart. The Holy Spirit prompts us to share our resources and give generously to those in need, following the example of Jesus, who gave up heavenly riches to share His inheritance with all who trust in Him.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

GENEROSITY – Sharing our best with others.

HEAD

How did Jesus' followers provide for each other's needs?

Describe how Ananias and Sapphira acted deceitfully toward the church and God Himself.

HEART

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear generous without making the necessary sacrifice. How can remembering that Jesus gave up all things to come to the earth and die for us on the cross change our motivation to give of ourselves generously?

Was God's concern that Ananias and Sapphira didn't give all of the money, or that they *said* they gave it all? How can pride and comparing ourselves with others prevent us from being generous?

HANDS

The Bible reveals clearly that God is a generous God. List 3–5 ways that God has been generous to us. Now brainstorm 3–5 ways that you can model the same kind of generosity in your family, school or community this week. Choose one and ask the Holy Spirit to help you do it with the right attitude.